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Anthony Everett

Talking about Hamlet

Abstract: One argument for fictional realism, the view that there are such things as fictional characters, proceeds by arguing that we need to accept there are fictional characters in order to provide an adequate account of intuitively true and meaningful reports containing fictional names, reports such as »In *Hamlet*, Hamlet equivocates«. For, granted some plausible assumptions, it seems that the truth and meaningfulness of such reports requires that the names they contain genuinely refer to fictional characters. However I argue that the fictional realist herself faces problems providing an account of certain other forms of intuitively true reports. These are reports that intuitively seem to be about fictional characters but where the apparent reference to the fictional character is achieved, not via a fictional name, but rather descriptively. I consider, in particular, reports involving specific uses of indefinite descriptions, such as the report »In *Hamlet*, a certain prince equivocates«. The problem facing the realist is that the truth of this report requires the indefinite description »a certain prince« to denote the fictional character Hamlet. And this, in turn, seems to require that the fictional character Hamlet satisfies that description, and hence that the fictional character Hamlet genuinely be a prince. However I argue against the view that fictional characters genuinely have the properties ascribed to them in the fictions where they occur. In the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet is characterized as being a human and being a prince. But, I argue, even if we accept that there are fictional characters and that Hamlet is one of them, we shouldn't take the fictional character Hamlet to genuinely be a human or a prince. I then consider and reject various other strategies the fictional realist might adopt to try and provide an account of descriptive reports. I argue that, ultimately, the realist must take such reports to be made within the scope of a make-believe or pretense that there is a world which is as the play *Hamlet* describes. For, while the realist shouldn't accept that the fictional character of Hamlet is really a prince, she can nevertheless grant that it counts as one within the scope of the make-believe that *Hamlet* correctly describes a real world. And she can maintain that the intuitive truth of such reports depends upon whether the sentences they embed count as being true within the scope of the relevant make-believe. However I note that this account is also available to the irrealist who denies there are fictional characters.

For, while the irrealist denies that really there is anything corresponding to Hamlet, she nevertheless grants that, within the make-believe, there is such a thing and it is a prince. Moreover it is very natural to extend this strategy to cover the sorts of reports containing fictional names, such as »In *Hamlet*, Hamlet equivocates«, that were invoked by the argument for fictional realism initially considered. However, if we adopt this strategy, we can explain our intuitions concerning these reports without our having to accept there are fictional objects. And so the argument for fictional realism that we initially considered is undermined. The very apparatus the realist invokes to provide an account of »In *Hamlet*, a certain prince equivocates« allows the irrealist to provide an account of »In *Hamlet*, Hamlet equivocates« without invoking fictional objects.

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Let's call sentences of the form »in fiction *F*, *P*,« sentences where some form of in-the-fiction operator is applied to a simpler sentence, *explicit metafictional reports*. One argument for fictional realism, the view that there really are fictional objects, proceeds by considering utterances of explicitly metafictional reports that contain fictional proper names, such as (1):

(1) In *Hamlet*, Hamlet equivocates.

Intuitively utterances of (1) seem to make true claims about what is the case in *Hamlet*. But, the argument goes, since proper names are devices of direct reference, they contribute only their bearer to the truth conditions of sentences containing them. Consequently, if the occurrence of the fictional name »Hamlet« in (1) failed to refer, the sentence embedded in (1) would fail to encode a complete truth condition. It would fail to express a proposition or, at best, it would express only a gappy proposition. However if we apply a sentential operator, such as »In *Hamlet*«, to a sentence with an incomplete truth condition, the resulting sentence will inherit the incompleteness of the sentence it embeds. So, if the occurrence of »Hamlet« in (1) failed to refer, utterances of (1) would not themselves have complete truth conditions. That is to say, they would fail to make truth evaluable claims, or at very best they would make the same claim as utterances of (2):

(2) In *Hamlet*, Prospero equivocates.

Neither alternative seems satisfactory. So, the argument continues, in order to provide an adequate account of explicitly metafictional reports containing fictional names, such as (1), we must accept that the occurrences of fictional names they contain refer to fictional objects. Consequently we must accept there are fictional objects.

The fictional irrealist might obviously try to block this argument in various ways. Thus she might deny that proper names contribute their bearer to the truth conditions of sentences containing them, perhaps holding instead that they contribute some sort of descriptive condition or Fregean sense. Or she might maintain that proper names contribute, not merely their bearer, but some further item to the truth conditions of sentences containing them, and that this somehow suffices for the sentence embedded within (1) to express a proposition to which the »In *Hamlet*« operator can apply. Alternatively she might try to argue that, while utterances of (1) are not genuinely true, there is a sense in which such utterances count as correct. She might then argue that our intuitions that utterances of (1) are true come from our conflating correctness with truth. Or she might argue that the correctness conditions of a report have become semantically conventionalized as its truth conditions, so that the result of applying a sentential operator to a sentence with an incomplete truth condition need always itself have an incomplete truth condition.

I want to explore these third and fourth options here and I will argue that they are both viable strategies for the fictional irrealist. But I want to sneak up on the problem of how the fictional irrealist might provide an account of (1) by arguing that fictional realists themselves face a problem providing an adequate account of certain explicit metafictional reports. Only the problem the realist faces comes not from reports such as (1) containing proper names which purportedly refer to fictional characters. Rather it comes from reports which intuitively seem to be about fictional characters but where this is descriptively mediated, where we seem to pick out and talk about a fictional object via some sort of descriptive condition. Examples of these include cases of metafictional reports involving specific uses of indefinite descriptions, possessives, and definite descriptions, such as:

- (3) In *Hamlet*, a certain prince equivocates,
- (4) In *Hamlet*, Polonius's murderer equivocates,
- (5) In *Hamlet*, the prince of Denmark equivocates.

In what follows I will focus upon (3) which perhaps most cleanly and neatly illustrates the problem, although similar difficulties are generated by cases such as (4) and (5).

When an indefinite description is used specifically it is used to talk about a specific individual rather than to make a general claim about the world. Thus, for example, consider the following situation. I went to graduate school with the philosopher Stacie Friend. Suppose that you and I are at a conference and are

talking about philosophers we know. Suppose further that Stacie is also at the conference and that I say:

(S) A certain philosopher at this conference went to graduate school with me.

I am not using the indefinite description to make a general claim to the effect that some philosopher or other at the conference went to graduate school with me, a claim that would be true had any philosopher at the conference gone to graduate school with me. Rather I am using the indefinite description to make a claim about a specific individual I have in mind, in this case Stacie Friend.

In the same sort of way we will naturally hear an utterance of (3), not as saying that in *Hamlet* some prince or other equivocates, but rather as making a claim about the specific individual the speaker has in mind, in this case Hamlet. The question for the fictional realist, then, is how are we able to use a specific indefinite such as that in (3) to make a claim about a fictional character. As we shall see, it is harder to provide a satisfactory answer here than one might initially suppose.

The first question that arises concerns how we should understand the »in *Hamlet*« operator in (3). Broadly speaking there seem to be two natural (not necessarily incompatible) ways we might think about such in-the-fiction operators. We might try to treat such operators as functioning in the same sort of way that modal and temporal operators – such as in world *w* or at time *t* – are often taken to function.¹ Such operators are often taken to be devices that shift the index or context of evaluation for the sentence they embed from the context of utterance to some alternative context. Alternatively we might regard an operator of the form »in fiction *F*« as expressing a relational property of truth-evaluable contents or propositions, to a first approximation the property of being true in fiction *F*. On this model in-the-fiction operators would function in the sort of way that the sentence matrices of discourse reports and propositional attitude reports – constructions such as »Peter said« and »Peter thinks« – are often taken to function.

(6) Peter said that *P*,

(7) Peter thinks that *Q*.

Thus (6) is often understood as encoding the claim that Peter stands in the saying relation to the content that *P* and (7) as encoding the claim that Peter stands in the thinking relation to the content that *Q*. Let's consider these two models in turn.

¹ Note that it is a further question whether we *should* take the modal and temporal expressions of natural languages to function in this way – see King 2003 for an excellent argument that while natural language modal expressions function as index-shifting devices, temporal expressions do not.

On the first model we would treat an in-the-fiction operator as shifting the index or context of evaluation of the sentence it embeds from the real world to the fictional world described in *Hamlet*. But the problem with adopting this model for in-the-fiction operators is that it seems to commit us to there really being such things as fictional worlds. And this seems highly dubious.

For one thing, we might well intuitively doubt that fictional worlds exist. Ordinary people say such things as »the world portrayed by *Hamlet* doesn't exist, it is simply fictional« and such utterances seem every bit as intuitively true as utterances of (1). And, if we take our intuitions that utterances of (1) are true and meaningful at face value, it seems we should also our intuitions that fictional worlds don't exist at face value. But then, if the former intuitions give us a reason to accept fictional objects, it seems the latter should give us a reason to deny there are fictional worlds.

For another, and I think more seriously, some fictions describe worlds that are inconsistent or incoherent in various ways and we might well doubt that there genuinely are worlds with these inconsistencies and incoherences. Thus, for example, Tamar Gendler's story *The Tower of Goldbach* (cf. Gendler 2000) portrays a world in which God first makes it the case that $7+5$ no longer equals 12, and then makes it the case that $7+5$ both does and does not equal 12. And it's not clear it is coherent to suppose there genuinely is a world in which $7+5$ fails to equal 12 at one time, and then in which $7+5$ both equals and does not equal 12 later on.²

To take another example, a fiction may not merely talk about fictional objects that do not really exist. It may also talk about fictional properties that do not really exist and entities belonging to fictional metaphysical categories that do not really exist. Consider, for example, Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* in which there is a runcible spoon. In reality there is no property of being runcible. The predicate »is runcible« does not express a condition that anything might satisfy. Nor, for that matter, does it express a condition that anything might fail to satisfy either, for it expresses no condition whatsoever. It is not that »is runcible« expresses a property that nothing could possibly have. Rather it fails to express anything whatsoever. But then it is hard to see how there could be any world in which anything was runcible. However, without such worlds, the strategy of explaining in-the-fiction operators in terms of fictional-worlds seems hard pressed to explain the apparent truth of:

(8) In Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat* there is a runcible spoon.

² Priest 2005 accepts an ontology that includes impossible worlds. But I suspect that many fictional realists will find such an ontology unpalatable. Moreover see Kroon 2005 and Nolan 2005 for some well-taken worries with Priest's account.

Again, suppose I write a fiction *f* about a world that contains *para-particulars*, entities that stand to particulars in the relation that particulars stand to universals. Then the following metafictional report seems true:

(9) In fiction *f* there are para-particulars.

But it seems very hard to see how a world could genuinely contain para-particulars, entities of an apparently incoherent metaphysical category. It is not that »para-particular« expresses a category to which nothing could possibly belong. Rather it fails to express anything at all. So the fictional-worlds strategy we are considering seems unable to provide an adequate account of (9). These sorts of worries can be multiplied indefinitely.

The considerations just rehearsed obviously undermine views that take fictional worlds to be concrete particulars. They also undermine views that take fictional worlds to be sets of properties or sets of states of affairs, or to be complex properties or complex states of affairs. There is no property of being-runcible or state of affairs of something being-runcible. So there are no sets containing such things. And there is no complex property or state of affairs whose instantiation or obtaining would involve something having the property of being-runcible.

Admittedly the considerations just rehearsed do *not* undermine a view that takes fictional worlds to be sets of un-interpreted sentences. For, while there is no property of being-runcible, the sentence »there is a runcible spoon« certainly exists. And all that would be required on this view in order for (8) to be true would be for the un-interpreted sentence »there is a runcible spoon« to be a member of the set of un-interpreted sentences constituting the world of *The Owl and the Pussycat*. However adopting this view of fictional worlds will provide little comfort to the fictional realist. For note that if we adopted this account of fictional worlds it would *undermine* the argument sketched earlier for fictional realism from the apparent truth of utterances of (1). On this account of fictional worlds the truth of (1) would simply require that the set of sentences constituting the world of Hamlet contain the sentence »Hamlet equivocates«. And the irrealist can obviously accept this without thereby incurring any commitment to fictional objects.

So let's turn to the second model noted above. The idea here would be to regard »in *Hamlet*« as expressing the relational property of *being-true according to Hamlet*, or something along those lines. So on this strategy we might treat my utterance of (3) as encoding the claim that the play *Hamlet* stands in the making-true relation (or something similar) to the truth evaluable content expressed by my sub-utterance of the embedded sentence »a certain prince equivocates«.

But this raises the question of how we should understand the content of the sentence embedded in (3) and hence how we should understand the specific indefinite description it contains. Unfortunately there is significant controversy

over how we should understand specific indefinites. But fortunately, for our purposes, we don't need to get too embroiled in those controversies here.³ For our purposes here it simply suffices to note that, in order for a sentence containing a specific indefinite description »a certain F « to count as making a felicitous specific claim about x , x must satisfy the predicate » F «. To bring this recall the scenario discussed above where we are at a conference with Stacie Friend, talking about philosophers we know. And this time suppose that I utter not (S) but rather (10), intending to talk about Stacie:

(10) *A certain physicist at this conference went to graduate school with me.

Stacie Friend is not a physicist. So although I may have succeeded in speaker-referring to Stacie here, there seems something highly infelicitous about (10). Thus, it seems, in order for me to felicitously use »a certain prince« to make a specific claim about x , x must genuinely satisfy the noun »prince«, that is to say x must be a prince. Consequently, it seems, the indefinite in the sentence embedded in (3) can only be used to make a felicitous specific claim about the character of Hamlet if the character of Hamlet is in fact a prince.

Moreover, of course, this problem generalizes. For given any character c which is described in a fiction f as being G and H , we can make a felicitous and intuitively correct specific metafictional report about the content of f of the form »In fiction f , a certain G is H «. So the approach we are considering seems to require that fictional characters genuinely have the properties attributed to them in the relevant fictions, a view we might call *literalism*.

I shall not say much about literalism here save to make two brief observations. Firstly literalism is incompatible with the more plausible forms of fictional realism, which take fictional objects to be abstract entities, since presumably abstract entities cannot literally be princes or have many of the other properties fictions seem to ascribe to fictional characters. And, secondly, literalism seems to face grave problems handling the sorts of cases noted above where fictional objects are described as having fictional properties, such as being runcible, or where a fiction describes a world containing entities from alien metaphysical categories such as para-particulars. For the literalist is committed to there being things that really are runcible and to there being things that really belong to the category of para-particulars. And this is unacceptable.⁴

Perhaps the natural move in response to this worry is to maintain that the occurrence of the noun »prince« in the description »a certain prince« should in fact

³ For an excellent discussion of these issues see chapter 4 of Hawthorne/Manley 2012.

⁴ For further worries about views of this sort see chapter 2.2 of Sainsbury 2010.

be read as »fictional prince«, where we would grant that the fictional character Hamlet is a fictional prince even if he is not a real prince. But this can't be right either. For on this account the intuitively correct (3) would be rendered as:

(11) In *Hamlet*, a certain fictional prince equivocates.

Now observe that both (3) and (11) have a wide-scope and a narrow-scope reading, depending upon whether we hear the indefinite description as taking wide or narrow scope relative to the »In Hamlet« operator.

(3W) A certain prince is such that, in *Hamlet*, they equivocate,

(3N) In *Hamlet*, a certain prince equivocates.

(11W) A certain fictional prince is such that, in *Hamlet*, they equivocate,

(11N) In *Hamlet*, a certain fictional prince equivocates.

If the suggestion we are considering was correct then the wide-scope reading of (3) would be given by (11W) and the narrow-scope reading of (3) would be given by (11N). However note that, while the narrow-scope reading of (3) seems intuitively correct, the narrow-scope reading of (11) does not. The narrow-scope reading of (11) says that, in *Hamlet*, a certain individual who counts within the world of the play as being a fictional prince equivocates. However, in the world of the play, Hamlet counts as being a real prince rather than a fictional prince.⁵ So on this reading (11) says something straightforwardly incorrect or false. But then, since the narrow-scope reading of (3) is correct while that of (11) is incorrect, the suggestion we are considering cannot be right. We cannot simply read the occurrence of the noun »prince« in (3) as »fictional prince«.

A distinct but related suggestion would hold that when we predicate a noun *F* of an object, this predication has two different but related readings. On the first of these readings *F* applies only to those things that are literally *F*. On the second reading *F* applies to those things that are described by some fiction as being *F*. Thus, on the first reading, the noun »prince« will apply only to real princes while on the second reading it will apply to fictional princes, to things that are described as being princes by some fiction. And when the play *Hamlet* describes Hamlet as a prince it predicates »prince« of the fictional object Hamlet in the second of these senses.

In fact there are two ways in which we might cash this thought out. Firstly we might hold that »prince« has two readings, on the first of which it applies only to

⁵ To bring this out consider the contrast between Hamlet and Gonzago (a character who occurs in the »play-within-the-play« that Hamlet stages). While, in *Hamlet*, Hamlet is a real rather than a fictional prince, Gonzago is a fictional rather than a real king.

real princes and on the second of which it applies only to fictional princes. Let's call this the *exclusive* strategy. Secondly we might hold that »prince« has two readings, on the first of which it will apply only to real princes while on the second of which it will apply *both* to real princes and *also* to fictional princes. Let's call this the *inclusive* strategy. Both strategies can avoid the sorts of problems just noted. For on neither strategy does the truth of (3) require that the fictional object Hamlet is a real prince. And neither strategy commits us to holding that the occurrence of »prince« in (3) abbreviates »fictional prince«. Neither strategy will do, however.

One serious worry with both strategies concerns whether it is really plausible to suppose that a fiction which describes a character as being *F* really predicates *F* of that character in a special fictional way rather than simply predicating *F* of that character in the normal way in which we predicate *F* of real objects. But each strategy faces further problems (actually we could see these as ways of bring out the problem just noted).

Taking the exclusive strategy first, consider, for example, the following VP-elision:

(12) Holmes is a detective but Watson isn't.

This has a reading on which it seems a felicitous thing to say and, in particular, on which the second conjunct seems correct. Presumably advocates of the exclusive strategy will cash out this reading as follows: on this reading the first conjunct of (12) correctly says of the fictional object Holmes that it is a detective in the fictional sense, while the second conjunct correctly denies this of the fictional object Watson – that is to say it denies that Watson is a detective in the fictional sense. But now consider:

(13) Holmes is a detective but Pinkerton isn't.

On the exclusive strategy we are considering we should hear the second conjunct of (13) as true. For it would deny that Pinkerton is a detective in the fictional sense. And Pinkerton is not a detective in the *fictional* sense any more than Watson. Pinkerton is a real detective, not a fictional one. However there seems no reading of (13) on which its second conjunct is true. To reinforce this point, consider:

(14) Holmes is a detective but Watson and Pinkerton aren't.

If there was indeed the sort of ambiguity alleged by the exclusive strategy there would be a natural and intuitively correct reading of (14) on which the first conjunct claims that Holmes is a detective in the fictional sense while the second conjunct denies that Watson and Pinkerton are detectives in this very same

fictional sense. That is to say, if the strategy we are considering was correct, there would be a natural reading of (14) on which it was not a zeugma and on which its second conjunct was true.⁶ However there seems no reading of (14) on which its second conjunct is true. So the exclusive strategy must be wrong.⁷

The realist who adopts the exclusive strategy being considered here might respond that we do not hear (14) as having the reading suggested above on which it is true.⁸ If we know that *a* is fictional we will naturally hear the claim that *a* is *F* as claiming that *a* is *F* in the fictional sense (and the claim that *a* is not *F* as claiming that *a* is not *F* in the fictional sense). And if we know that *a* is real we will naturally hear the claim that *a* is *F* as claiming that *a* is *F* in the non-fictional sense (and the claim that *a* is not *F* as claiming that *a* is not *F* in the non-fictional sense). Because of this, the response continues, our knowledge that Watson is fictional but Pinkerton is real leads us to hear the second conjunct of (14) as (correctly) denying that Watson is a detective in the fictional sense while (incorrectly) denying that Pinkerton is a detective in the non-fictional sense. That is to say we will naturally hear the second conjunct of (14) as false. Thus our knowledge that Watson is fictional and Pinkerton is real will lead us to interpret (14) as making a false claim for the reasons just noted.

However this response on behalf of the exclusive strategy will not do. If the response worked then we would expect to find other potential readings of other ambiguous expressions blocked in a similar way. That is to say, we would expect to find cases where a potentially ambiguous sentence »*a* is *F*« has one of its

6 I would like to thank to a referee for forcing me to be clearer about this.

7 A referee suggests that the realist might respond by arguing that the surface structure of (14) is misleading and that, in fact, we should render (14):

(*) There are an *x* and a *y* such that according to the Holmes-stories (*x* is called »Holmes« and is a detective and *y* is called »Watson« and is not a detective) and Pinkerton is not a detective.

However this sort of response fails for a number of reasons. If (*) is supposed to be a proposal about the syntactic structure of (14) then it is unacceptable. It would bestow a syntactic structure on (14) that is radically at odds with contemporary syntactic theory and would lack the sort of syntactic motivation required by linguists working in syntax. If (*) is supposed to be a proposal, not about the syntax of (14) but rather about its truth conditions then (i) we need an account of how a sentence with the syntax of (14) could come to have those truth conditions and (ii) we are required to make an apparently ad hoc and otherwise unmotivated distinction between the semantic behavior of the fictional names in (14) and the non-fictional names (in effect taking the former but not the latter to function semantically as meta-linguistic descriptions). The realist might respond by adopting a meta-linguistic descriptivist analysis of non-fictional names as well. But such accounts face severe and well known difficulties; for details see Soames 2002 and Everett 2005.

8 Thanks to a referee for bringing this response to my attention.

readings blocked by our knowledge that *a* falls under category C1 but not under category C2. But we do not. So the response fails. To bring this point out consider the following case. If we know that *a* is an institution we will naturally hear the claim that *a* is a bank as claiming that *a* is a financial-bank (and the claim that *a* is not a bank as claiming that *a* is not a financial-bank). And if we know that *a* is a geographical phenomenon we will naturally hear the claim that *a* is a bank as claiming that *a* is a river-bank (and the claim that *a* is not a bank as claiming that *a* is not a river-bank). Nevertheless consider the following:

- (15) The side of the Thames where I moored the boat is a bank but Lloyds is not.
- (16) The side of the Thames where I moored the boat is a bank but the World Health Organization and Lloyds are not.

Both (15) and (16) have very natural readings on which (i) they are not zeugmas, and (ii) they make true claims.⁹ Thus (15) has a natural reading on which it says that the side of the Thames is a river-bank and Lloyds is not a river-bank. And (16) has a natural reading on which it says that the side of the Thames is a river-bank and the WHO and Lloyds are not river-banks. Note, moreover, that these readings of (15) and (16) are, in fact, arguably *more natural* than readings of (15) and (16) on which (15) falsely claims that the side of the Thames is a river-bank and Lloyds is not a financial-bank, and (16) falsely claims that the side of the Thames is a river-bank and the WHO and Lloyds are not financial-banks.

So the response we are considering on behalf of the exclusive strategy fails. We naturally hear (15) and (16) as making true claims that are not zeugmas. Consequently, if the exclusive strategy we are considering was correct, we should also be able to hear (13) and (14) as making true claims that are not zeugmas. But we cannot hear (13) and (14) as making true claims. So the exclusive strategy fails.

Let's now turn to the inclusive strategy. The thought here is that the noun »prince« is associated with two sets of application conditions, its normal application conditions and a broader set which *includes* the normal everyday application conditions but on which something may *also* count as satisfying the noun »prince« if that thing is described as being a prince in fiction. We might regard this as a semantic phenomenon, treating the predicate as polysemous. Or we might treat it as a pragmatic phenomenon, with the extended use being understood as a form of speaker-meaning or perhaps understood as some form of contextual modulation. Either way, this approach is able to avoid the Pinkerton

⁹ Of course, these claims are very obvious and because of this may sound slightly odd. But this oddness simply reflects the fact that it is hard to imagine contexts where they would be made since few people are likely to mistake Lloyds or the WHO for a geographical phenomenon.

problem. For as Pinkerton is a real detective, on this approach he will also count as a detective in the extended sense. And so, if the predicate »detective« in (12)–(14) is being used in this extended sense, we would *expect* to hear the second conjuncts of (13) and (14) as false. In order for x to fail to satisfy the predicate »detective« used in an extended sense x must *both* fail to be a real detective *and also* fail to be a fictional detective.

However the inclusive strategy faces problems of its own. For suppose I write a story in which, say, Obama was born in the 18th century. Since an object satisfies a predicate F in the extended sense just in case either it really satisfies F , or it counts as satisfying F in the fiction, it follows that Obama will satisfy the predicate »born in the 18th century« in the extended sense. And, since Obama was in fact born in the 20th century, he will satisfy the predicate »born in the 20th century« in the normal sense. But then, on the view we are considering, he will *also* satisfy the predicate »born in the 20th century« in the *extended* sense. And so there should be a reading of the following, with the predicates understood in this extended sense, on which it is true:

(17) Obama was born in the 18th century and Stacie was born in the 20th century,

But there is simply no reading of (17) on which it is true. So I think we must reject the inclusive strategy as well.

How might the realist proceed from here? The problems we have just been considering come from the view that (3) is true just in case the content of the embedded sentence is such that, it is true in *Hamlet*. For we then faced the problem of explaining how the embedded sentence could express a specific claim about the character of Hamlet. The embedded sentence, it seems, cannot do this if we interpret it from the perspective of the real world in which the character of Hamlet is a fictional object and not a genuine prince. Rather, it seems, the embedded sentence can only make a claim about the character of Hamlet if we understand it as being uttered from within the perspective of the play and we interpret it from within that perspective, a perspective from within which the character of Hamlet *does* count as a genuine prince. In short, the embedded sentence can only have the right content if, when we utter and interpret (3), we are talking and interpreting *as-if* the world we inhabit was as the play Hamlet describes.

We can make this thought a little bit more precise as follows. With Kendall Walton (Walton 1990) let's regard each fiction as being associated with an authorized game of make-believe in which we are mandated to participate when we imaginatively engage with the fiction. When we engage in this make-believe we, in effect, treat the relevant fiction as-if it correctly describes the genuine world. When we produce or consume (3) or similar metafictional reports we dip

into this make-believe, as it were. We hear the sentences they embed as being uttered from within this make-believe. And we interpret them, that is to say we semantically and pragmatically process them, while engaged in this make-believe. We will take a metafictional report to be correct just in case, when we process the embedded sentence within the scope of the make-believe, the embedded sentence counts as expressing a truth.

I emphasize that we must be careful when specifying what is required for an utterance of (3) to be intuitively true. It does not require that the embedded sentence in (3) has a content concerning Hamlet which, within the official make-believe associated with *Hamlet*, counts as true. Rather it requires that the embedded sentence in (3) be such that, within the official game of make believe for *Hamlet*, it counts as having a content concerning Hamlet that is true.

We can tell an analogous story if we prefer to think of in-the-fiction operators as context shifting devices. For we might hold that the make-believe associated with *Hamlet* involves our imagining that, in addition to the real world, there is a world which is as the play *Hamlet* describes. In reality there is no such world. But there is such a world within the scope of the make-believe. We might then regard the production and consumption of (3) as taking place within the scope of this make-believe, and within that make-believe the operator in (3) as shifting the context of evaluation for the embedded sentence from the real world to that fictional world. On this account we would then take (3) to be correct just in case, within this make-believe, the embedded sentence counts as true with respect to that fictional world.

So far I have suggested how the fictional realist might explain the intuitive truth of (3) and why we take (3) to be true. But I have not considered whether she should hold that utterances of (3) are *genuinely* true or whether she should hold that we merely mistakenly *hear* them as true. On the latter option she might maintain that while such utterances are not literally true, we nevertheless hear them as true because we mistake their truth within the make-believe for their genuine truth and because they convey correct information about the content of *Hamlet*. On the former option she might maintain that the practice of using such reports to convey such information has become conventionalized, and the conditions under which they count as true in the make-believe have become conventionally encoded as truth conditions, so that they may count as genuinely true.¹⁰ But for our purposes we don't need to decide between these two options. Rather I merely note that both options are in principle available to the realist.

¹⁰ This, of course, would involve accepting that the semantic content of such utterances was not compositionally determined, although the departure from compositionality here might still be acceptable as it would be reasonably systematic.

I have suggested, then, two natural ways in which the realist might explain how utterances of (3) might in some sense count as making a specific claim about the character Hamlet, even though the descriptive material in the indefinite description is not genuinely satisfied by that character and even though there are no such things as fictional worlds. However note that these accounts are available to *both* the realist *and* the irrealist about fictional characters alike. The irrealist can equally happily hold that we take utterances of (3) to be true just in case the embedded sentence counts within the make-believe as having a content concerning Hamlet that is true. For the embedded sentence may count as having this status within the make-believe whether or not there is a fictional character of Hamlet. Likewise if we think of in-the-fiction operators as context shifting devices, the irrealist can happily accept that we take utterances of (3) to be true just in case, within the make-believe that there is a world which is as the play *Hamlet* describes, the embedded sentence counts as true with respect to that world. As with the realist, the irrealist might then deny that utterances of (3) are genuinely true but hold that we hear them as true because they serve to convey correct information about the content of *Hamlet*. Or she might hold that the practice of using such utterances to convey such information has become conventionalized, and their correctness conditions have become conventionally encoded as truth conditions, so that utterances of (3) may count as genuinely true. Once again, for our purposes here, we need not consider which option the irrealist should adopt. The point is simply that the irrealist may simply adopt whatever account the realist adopts of our intuitions concerning (3).

However also note that, in so far as such an account of (3) is correct, it should presumably apply not merely to metafictional reports such as (3) which contain specific indefinite descriptions, but should apply equally to *all* metafictional reports. That is to say it should apply equally to reports such as (1) involving fictional names. But if this is so, there seems nothing that need worry the irrealist about (1). On the first approach noted above we should not take (1) to be intuitively true just in case the sentence it embeds encodes a content which counts as true in the make-believe. Rather we should take (1) to be intuitively true just in case, within the scope of the make-believe, the sentence it embeds counts as having a true content. And within the make-believe, the embedded sentence could count as having a true content – and the fictional name it contains count as referring – without those things really being the case. In a similar way, on the second approach, we should not take utterances of (1) to be intuitively true just in case there is a fictional world containing Hamlet which is as the embedded sentence describes. Rather we should take utterances of (1) to be intuitively true just in case, within the make believe that there is such a world, the embedded sentence counts as correctly describing that world.

A final observation is in order. So far I have been considering how the realist and irrealist should understand what I called *explicit metafictional reports*, sentences of the form »in fiction F , P «, where some form of in-the-fiction operator is applied to a simpler sentence. But we can ask the same question about what we might call *explicit make-believe reports*, sentences of the form »in make-believe M , P «, which appear to involve some form of in-the-make-believe operator being applied to a simpler sentence. I suggest we should say exactly the same thing about *explicit make-believe reports* as about *explicit metafictional reports*. In both cases the intuitive correctness of the report depends upon whether the embedded sentence counts as true within the relevant make-believe. We might then hold that the correctness conditions for such reports has become conventionalized as their genuine truth conditions. Or we might hold that such reports strike us as true because we mistake truth within the make-believe for genuine truth. As I noted earlier in connection with *explicit metafictional reports*, at least for our purposes here we don't need to decide between these options.¹¹

Let us briefly recap. The account the realist offers of (3) looks as if it will be one the irrealist can also happily accept. And it looks as if it will be an account that will carry over to handle cases such as (1) as well. I conclude that the argument I initially sketched for fictional realism is undermined.

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¹¹ These and related issues are discussed at greater length in Everett 2013; see in particular sections 3.2, 3.5, and 4.1.